

Breaking the Addictive Cycle:

Deadly Obsessions or
Simple Pleasures?

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Stacie loves to shop. She often plans her whole day around going to her favorite stores. Getting something new always makes her happy...for a while. But soon she notices something else she really “needs.” She spends a lot of time thinking about (and plotting how to make) her next purchase. Lately, she hasn’t told her husband when she goes shopping because “he would just get upset.” Stacie knows she is spending too much money and time buying stuff, but she doesn’t know how to stop.

Kyle likes playing video games. He especially gets absorbed in the complicated, role-playing games—playing them for hours, days, weeks. He spends most of his free time on the computer. His wife complains that he spends far more time playing video games than he does with her and the children or on household responsibilities. When she goes to bed, he goes on the computer. It’s just easier if she doesn’t know exactly how long he is playing. He knows he is slacking off at work because he’s tired from being up all night. Every morning he thinks, *I won’t get on the computer tonight after work*, but somehow he always does.

Jamie enjoys eating. In fact, she enjoys food so much that she plans her route to work so she can stop at her favorite donut shop. At work, she maintains a private stash of snacks in her desk “just in case I need a little pick-me-up.” All morning she thinks about what she will order for lunch, and then it’s on to planning a big dinner. Sometimes she gets up late at night and finishes all the leftovers from dinner. Her blood sugar and cholesterol numbers are too high. Her weight is climbing. Jamie knows she should cut back on food, but whenever she tries to diet, she thinks about food even more.¹

It’s easy to see that Stacie, Kyle, and Jamie are looking for pleasure, but the harder they try to find it, the less pleasure they feel. Instead, they’ve become obsessed with getting more and more of what once gave them enjoyment. Their pleasures deliver less and less, and come at a greater cost to family, pocketbook, and health. The things they pursue are not the hardcore “addictions”—things that are illegal, immoral, and obviously self-destructive. They are not the textbook

“obsessive-compulsive disorders.” But any pleasure running amok becomes an obsession and a compulsion. They clearly illustrate the addictive cycle. Understanding “little” addictions helps us to understand the big addictions. The solution turns out to be exactly the same! And it begins with understanding God’s good gift of pleasure.

Simple Pleasures Are Good

It would be easy to think that the solution to Stacie, Kyle, and Jamie’s problems (and yours) is to reject all pleasure and enjoyment. But just becoming more disciplined ignores how God made us. God made us to feel. Something is missing if we don’t ask questions about what is beautiful, about joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain, adoration and disgust. It can be hard for us to understand that pure pleasure was created “very good.” And it is hard for us to understand how pleasure is being recreated by Jesus as “very, very good.”

People often say, “I don’t want to become a Christian because I’ll have to give up the ten things I most

love doing and do the ten things I most hate doing.” These people don’t realize that the things on their list are false. They don’t understand exactly how pleasure is wired into human experience.

What gives *you* pure and simple pleasure? What truly refreshes you? What helps you to lay your cares down and get a fresh perspective on life? What enables you to step back into the business and hardship of life with a new joy?

My own list includes lighting up when I see an old friend. I’m so glad to see someone I love. A particular meal can evoke warm memories that take me back to childhood joys. And for simple pleasure, there is nothing finer than shooting hoops. One time I hit forty-seven straight free throws!

In a novel by Patrick O’Brian, a man considers whether to buy an Amati violin. He loves music, but the violin is costly. His friend says to him, “Certainly you must have your fiddle. Any innocent pleasure is a real good. There are not so many of them.”² In other words, “This is something truly good. Do it. Spend the money.”